

A God with Hands

4th Sunday of Easter (Year C)

May 12, 2019

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Our sense of touch is one of our greatest blessings and greatest curses. We absolutely need it to know we are loved. As infants, just being held gave us the ability to trust the world and grow up. Whenever we touch someone in love we affirm them and make them feel worthwhile. To not be touched can make us feel invisible or forgotten over time. However, touch can also be the downfall of a human life. One bad touch, such as domestic violence, can ruin a relationship and shatter the trust we have in humanity. We need to touch and be touched, but it is unfortunate how often this kind of talk necessarily has to carry negative connotations.

As Christians, we are called to restore the sense of touch to its original goodness. In today's Gospel, while speaking metaphorically about God the Father, Jesus suggests that God has hands. Hands are so central to touch. Speaking about his followers, Jesus says, "no one can take them out of the Father's hand." Knowing that as followers of Jesus we are held in the Father's hand is so comforting and empowering. Hands embrace us and make us feel cared for. That is the blessing of touch.

Jean Vanier, a spiritual giant who died this past week at age 90, knew about the importance of the sense of touch. As founder of communities throughout the world for people with disabilities, he knew that words and ideas meant very little to the people he served. Many of them could barely communicate verbally. But all of them gave and received love through touch. It is the only way they knew, yet it points to just how profound touch can be.

In one of his books, Vanier tells the story of visiting a psychiatric hospital. He said, “hundreds of children with severe disabilities were lying, neglected, on their cots. There was a deadly silence. Not one of them was crying.” Before going any further, this seems counter-intuitive...shouldn't they all be crying? Vanier continues to explain why they were so silent. “When they realize that nobody cares, that nobody will answer them, children no longer cry. It takes too much energy. We cry out only when there is hope that someone may hear us.” (*Becoming Human*, 9)

Having someone reach out to us lovingly and appropriately is so life giving. On this Mother's Day weekend, we give thanks that so many of us have had a positive experience of our mothers. Like God, our mothers used their hands to care and provide for us. Their touch was pure love.

Touch is meant to be a form of love.

What role does the sense of touch play in my life? It is one of our 5 senses so we do need it.

Touch communicates a lot more than words. It calls for constant discernment as to what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. May we have the grace to know the difference so that we may truly be the hands of God in our world today.